

Putting Tithing Into Perspective

After watching the 'A Current Affair' episode titled "Planetshakers"¹ using the 9NOW tablet app in July, it was very saddening to see the organisation's biased focus on giving. With a \$20m-odd profit in the previous year and preaching on tithing so that it became religious pressure I am forced to reiterate the Kingdom understanding of tithing.²

Tithing:

1. Is OC.
2. Was 23.33%, not 10%. (There are 3 tithes, not just one.)
3. Was a welfare system for the poor, widows, fatherless and priests.
4. Was paid in food, not money, as it was the increase of agricultural production. (Could be converted to money for long distance travel to Jerusalem.)
5. Was not used for temple building or maintenance. (This was separate giving to the temple treasury.)

Shane Claiborne has a better perspective on tithing than the usual church organisation. After recounting his counselling of the leaders at Willow Creek Community Church (South Barrington, IL) when they wanted to spend a large sum of money on building development he then introduces the Relational Tithe to his readers in his book:

"If nothing else, the dialogue with folks at Willow Creek became a catalyst for many of us to pluck the plank from our own eyes rather than trying to get the speck out of our neighbors' eyes. Church father Ignatius said that if our church is not marked by caring for the poor, the oppressed, and the hungry, then we are guilty of heresy. A new reformation is long overdue. We began to dream of what it would look like to reimagine the offerings, since God intended them to be instruments of a redistributive economy. We considered how the early church brought their offerings and laid them at the apostles' feet to be redistributed to folks as they had need. And we came up with something beautiful and small – the relational tithe."³

A relational tithe is a network of reborn friends around the world organized in little cells, like in a body, taking care of each other. Like the early church, all offerings and needs are brought to the community. Unlike the early church, we have a blog and can wire money across the globe. We pool 10 percent of our income into a common fund. Regularly, the needs of our neighborhoods and villages are also brought before the community, and we meet them as we are able. Meanwhile, we are building relationships that radically tear through the economic walls that divide us, from economists to homeless folks, all the time trusting that we can do more together than we could do alone. Together, we've helped friends get cars, keep their utilities on, create new jobs, send kids to summer camp, throw birthday parties, and send people on their first vacation. And it all happens through relationships. No one is giving or receiving who is not grounded in sincere friendships. When the tsunami hit in 2004, two folks from the RT went over to Thailand, and as they brought before the community the needs of people they met, we helped repair fences and boats and playgrounds (and even got a write-up in the Bangkok Post, one of Thailand's most prominent papers). After the 2005 hurricane hit the Gulf, folks from the Relational Tithe and other friends sent supplies and people down to Louisiana on a bus running off veggie oil (which was particularly delightful at a time when gas prices were nearing four dollars a gallon!). Folks in the RT also organized a network of families and communities who opened up their homes to folks displaced by the hurricane. Whew! That all sounds like God's vision for a human family with a parent with a big, divine wallet and a lot of love. The Relational

1 – www.9now.com.au/a-current-affair

2 – SEE: "12-Extravagant Giving: Not Tithing" (canberraforerunners.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/12-extravagant-giving-not-tithing.pdf)
SEE: "My Tithing Blog" (disruptingculture.com/2014/12/20/my-tithing-blog-finally)

3 – Check out: relationaltithe.com

Tithe is still going as strong as ever-actually it seems to get stronger every year. We now have a global movement, with little clusters scattered all over the world under a larger umbrella now called Common Change.

*Relational Tithe is still what we call the charter community, the thirty-five or so of us who started it ten years ago. We've seen entire congregations and communities start their own chapters. I think we have more than fifty affiliated groups now. At the core is the fundamental belief that there is enough for everyone's need, and that we are all better off together than on our own. But to love those in need, we have to first know those in need, so we still give only to people we know, folks we are friends with no gifts to organizations or people we read about in newsletters. With knowing comes true community-and wisdom, as we discern how to most responsibly share the resources and the needs among us. Recently we've sent folks to college, repaid money lost in a robbery, repaired vandalism done to a car, paid a dowry, and bought someone dentures. Since its inception in 2005, we have shared more than \$850,000 with thousands of families around the world. And true to the vision of "growing small", these little clusters continue to multiply, as do our resources. But it is still friends sharing with friends. Check it out: www.commonchange.com. Heck, think about starting your own common-change experiment right where you are."*⁴

Think for a moment of Robert Schuller's Crystal Cathedral⁵ in California. It has 10,000 windows, a 52 bell carillon, 25m tall doors that electronically open behind the pulpit, a 5m tall 18-carat gold cross and a giant outdoor movie screen for 'drive-in' attendees. What a difference in tithe spending between Shane Claiborne and Robert Schiller. At least Shane tries to exemplify Father's heart.

BUT both are not Kingdom methods of giving.

Here's the Kingdom perspective for Kingdom citizens :

- They have been purchased (redeemed) into freedom by the sacrificial blood of their King.
- They are indentured servants (bond-servants) of their sovereign.
- Their King owns everything in the Kingdom and gives money, possessions, family, etc., to his vassals for them to steward for him.
- They own NOTHING.
- Their liege is their financier and resourcer.
- Their use and disposal of stewarded possessions are done as they believe in faith that is righteous and as the King directs them.
- Their responsibility is to follow the Spirit's communication.
- They don't tithe any percentage amount.
- They give with all their heart and with no attachment to what they give away.
- They give what the Spirit shows them to give or as the King places desires in their hearts.
- They know that they are to give of everything they have – money, time, energy, possessions, life.
- They know that they are given possessions and finance at the level the King wishes it.
- They don't have to be paupers and they don't fear being rich.
- Religious activity and processes have no place in their lives.
- They discern what is religious and what is of the Kingdom.

4 – Shane Claiborne (2016) “The Irresistible Revolution: Living as an ordinary radical” Zondervan (Updated & expanded edition) p:317-319

5 – It went bankrupt and was purchased by the RCs in 2012 (www.christcathedralcalifornia.org)

In Community, our giving priorities are:

1. Our own family and relations first.
2. Community members.
3. Other believers.
4. The local town/suburb community.

It is important to give to those you know and trust.

Giving to overseas missions, etc., is only as the Spirit leads and only for a particular time period. We are called to be 'missionaries' to our own local communities.

Don't be conned by fear or pressure to give any other way.

Laurence

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